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## What Can TV Teach Us About the Spiritually Healthy Institution?

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### Abstract

This article posits that the television series *Bones* offers a model for a lively, vital, and spiritually healthy 21<sup>st</sup> century Catholic institution of higher education. It does this through a close analysis of the series as a whole as informed by arguments posed by Catholic thinkers, and it argues that the show—through its characters, settings, stories, plots, and themes—self-consciously and consistently engages and explores various aspects of faith and reason, justice and ethics, within the context of a multidisciplinary research institution. In this way, an examination of the series can add depth and dimension within which educators are able to find spiritual, intellectual, and affective resonances.

### Introduction

Whether we watch them on a television set, a mobile device, or a computer, television series enter our lives, shaping and informing our values both personal and cultural. We dissect our favorite shows, putting our thoughts on display for others to engage by means of a variety of social media platforms. Because they enter our lives through such an intimate medium, the characters we encounter take on something very close to a lived dimension. They show up week after week, episode after episode, year after year. Thanks to the power of online streaming and DVDs, even after a series is cancelled they do not go away. We meet them over dinner, after work, before we head to school, in the hours we should be studying and writing, and in those gap times when we find ourselves with time on our hands.

The power of television has much to do with the fact that, unlike a movie that must tell its story in one film, a series unfolds over several episodes and, if it's lucky, many seasons. This allows a series to explore, deepen, complicate, and transform characters over time within the comfort of familiar settings, stories, and character types. TV shows can reinforce, challenge, question, or subvert our deeply held ideas, values, attitudes, and perspectives on a variety of issues, including gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, faith, and

ethics. They situate their stories and characters within a broad range of settings, all of which provide a context for exploring a wide-range of issues, concerns, questions and values, among which are the qualities we associate with a spiritually healthy institution.

Having just completed its twelfth and final season, the 20th Century Fox Television series *Bones* provides one such example, and, as such, is worth closer examination for what it offers as a model for a lively and vital twenty-first century Catholic institution.<sup>1</sup> The series, in many ways, is a conventional forensic procedural. However, the means by which the characters, settings, stories, plots, and themes self-consciously and consistently engage with and explore various aspects of faith and reason, justice and ethics, within the context of a multidisciplinary research institution adds depth and dimension. It is within these complex associations that educators can find spiritual, intellectual, and affective resonances.

### *Bones* and the Fictional Jeffersonian

The series, inspired by the life and work of real-life forensic anthropologist Kathy Reichs (who is also a producer on the show), features a team of forensic scientists who work with the FBI to solve murders.

McGrath & Reilly,  
*LMU President's  
Institute  
Collection:  
Introduction and  
Overview*

Snyder, *Necessary  
Companions:  
Faith and Reason*

McGrath & Reilly,  
*President's  
Institute on the  
Catholic  
Character of  
LMU: A Twenty-  
One-Year  
Tradition*

Bouvier-Brown,  
*Nurturing Student  
Scientists as  
People of Faith*

Jarvis, *Faith  
and Reason in  
the Pursuit of  
Understanding*

Rohm, *Our  
Students' Search  
for Meaning*

Scheibler, *What  
Can TV Teach Us  
About the  
Spiritually Healthy  
Institution?*

Reilly & McGrath,  
*Faith and Reason  
in Antiquity:  
A Photo Essay*

At the center of the team is Seelye Booth, a former Army Ranger sniper turned FBI agent, and Dr. Temperance Brennan, a brilliant forensic anthropologist. Booth and Brennan, also called “Bones” by Booth, work with Camille “Cam” Saroyan, an accomplished medical coroner; Jack Hodgins, the “bug and slime guy”; Angela Montenegro, talented artist and computer expert; and an array of Brennan’s most promising graduate students. The scientists work together at the Jeffersonian, a fictional institution that calls to mind the Smithsonian. Like the Smithsonian, the Jeffersonian is a museum, education and research complex located in Washington, D.C. The members of the Jeffersonian team are intellectually engaged members of their disciplines. Many of them hold multiple advanced degrees and, in spite of the amount of time they spend helping the FBI solve crimes, they continue to contribute well-respected and peer-reviewed scholarship to their disciplines. For his part Booth is a highly decorated Army Ranger and FBI agent who is called upon to lecture to other law enforcement agencies, including Scotland Yard.

Booth is a devout Catholic who attends church regularly and, until he and Brennan start living together outside of marriage, goes to confession weekly. His faith informs every aspect of his life, including, perhaps most profoundly, his reason for joining the FBI, which is, as he tells Brennan in the pilot episode, a desire to find absolution by solving one murder for every one of the fifty “kills” he committed as a sniper. Brennan, on the other hand, is a rational empiricist and self-proclaimed atheist who stands out, even among the other empiricists, atheists, and agnostics with whom she works, as hyper-rational. She finds it almost physically painful to make intuitive leaps or posit hypotheses that aren’t supported by a careful analysis of the evidence. Her ability to compartmentalize combined with her almost rabid embrace of objectivity and hard evidence often sets her in opposition to Booth, who depends on his intuition and instinct.

The narrative structure of the series provides the characters with the means, opportunity and motives to explore and discuss matters of faith and reason, justice and ethics, religion and science, and the relationships between disciplinary ways of knowing that characterize their work in all their nuances and complications. The series adheres to the conventions associated with a police/crime procedural show. Each episode begins with the discovery of a badly decomposed body, then unfolds through a double investigation with the Jeffersonian team using their various skills and expertise to determine the identity of the victim, the time and cause of death, and any relevant details that might help solve the case. Meanwhile Booth, sometimes with Brennan’s help, rounds up and interrogates potential suspects. Once the crime is solved, each episode ends with an epilogue that allows the characters to recall and reflect on what they have learned. They apply these lessons to their personal and professional lives, and, in some sense, gain consolation even in the midst of the grief and loss that comes from looking into the abyss of so much evil and suffering on a daily basis.

### **The Spiritually Healthy Institution**

In order for it to be effective in helping the FBI investigate and solve complicated crimes requiring a full array of scientific expertise from a variety of disciplines and approaches, there is no doubt that the Jeffersonian must be an intellectually healthy institution. Due to its emphasis on investigation, the series celebrates science and the use of inquiry-based rational analysis and argumentation. The dialogue between the members of the team is a constant interchange of scientific knowledge from a variety of discourses all challenging and informing each other in a way that enlarges and deepens the knowledge pool on which they rely to solve crimes. I would argue that what sets *Bones* apart from other television shows is precisely the same characteristics that set a spiritually healthy Catholic institution apart from its secular counterparts. That is, its emphasis on the centrality of the religious experience; a focus on the dialogue between faith and reason; and

a commitment to an ethos of hospitality and concern for the individual (*cura personalis*).

### **The Centrality of Religious Experience**

The series uses many opportunities to explore questions, issues, and concerns about religious experiences and the role they play in the lives of individuals as well as institutions and culture at large. Besides Booth's Catholicism, which shapes and informs every episode, several episodes have used specific characters to explore faith and religious belief.

Numerous cases have involved nuns, priests, bishops, and congregants as victims, suspects, witnesses, and/or survivors of one kind or another. In addition to using characters to represent faith traditions, numerous episodes have situated the crime and/or victims within specific religious groups, including Islam, the Amish, Voodoo, Native American spirituality,

Buddhism, Hinduism, and a variety of new age spiritual practices. The series is able to do this in great part because Brennan's character is a forensic anthropologist, well-versed in religious beliefs and practices both ancient and contemporary. Her disciplinary expertise as well as her scientific objectivity and curiosity provide an opening for the series to explore and reflect on the centrality of religious experience, even when there are conflicts between the religious or spiritual practice at hand and her own rational, empiricist worldview. In spite of her own personal scepticism, she remains respectfully open to learning about and understanding the beliefs of others. In this way the series, more than any other procedural show, devotes a great amount of narrative time to an exploration of the varieties of religious experience, as the following (non-exhaustive) episode list in Table 1 reveals.

**Table 1.** Exploration of religious experience in *Bones* episodes

<i>Episode</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Religious Theme</i>	<i>Air Date</i>
1.1	Pilot	Introduces Booth's Catholicism	September 13, 2005
1.2	The Man in the SUV	Islam	September 20, 2005
1.3	A Boy in a Tree	Catholicism (Booth's and the victim's)	September 27, 2005
1.4	Man in the Bear	Native American spiritual traditions	November 1, 2005
1.6	The Man in the Wall	Booth's Catholicism	November 15, 2005
1.9	The Man in the Fallout Shelter	Christianity in general	December 13, 2005
1.19	The Man in the Morgue	Voodoo	April 19, 2006
2.2	Mother and Child in the Bay	Booth's Catholic beliefs	September 6, 2006
2.9	Aliens in a Spaceship	Booth's Catholic beliefs	November 15, 2006
2.16	The Boneless Bride in the River	Traditional Chinese religious rituals	March 21, 2007
2.17	The Priest in the Churchyard	Catholicism	March 28, 2007
3.1	The Widow's Son in the Windshield	Knights of Columbus; secret societies; the Jesuits	September 25, 2007
3.8	The Knight on the Grid	Knights of Columbus	November 20, 2007
3.9	The Santa in the Slush	Coptic Christianity	November 27, 2007
4.7	The He in the She	TV evangelists; faith communities	October 8, 2008
4.16	The Salt in the Wounds	Islam	March 19, 2009
4.22	The Girl in the Mask	Shinto	April 23, 2009
5.3	The Plain in the Prodigy	Amish	October 1, 2009
5.14	The Devil in the Details	Catholicism and Islam	February 4, 2010
5.20	The Witch in the Wardrobe	Wicca	May 6, 2010
6.12	The Sin in the Sisterhood	Christian fundamentalism; Catholicism	February 3, 2011
6.19	The Finder	Jesuits	April 21, 2011
6.22	The he Heart	Catholicism	May 12, 2011
7.7	The Prisoner in the Pipe	Christianity; Nativity story	April 2, 2012
8.13	The Twist in the Plot	Buddhism	January 28, 2013
8.15	The Shot in the Dark	The question of an afterlife	February 11, 2013
9.1	The Secrets in the Proposal	Catholicism	September 16, 2013
9.17	The Repo Man in the Septic Tank	The value of raising children in a faith environment; church	March 17, 2014
9.19	The Turn in the Urn	Romani beliefs	March 31, 2014

Source: "[Bones: Episode list](#)," IMDB.com, accessed November 16, 2017

### Dialogue Between Faith and Reason

The spiritually healthy institution is a place where faith and reason encounter one another in dialogue. It is also a space that reflects what Mark Roche argues is the task of the Catholic university: "to create enough safe spaces and trusting relationships within the academic workplace—hedged about by appropriate structural protections—that more of us will be able to tell the truth about our own struggles and joys."<sup>2</sup> As he points out, the goal is to create the conditions by which each person can cultivate the gifts with which he or she has been endowed, including reason.<sup>3</sup>

We find one example in an early episode entitled "A Man in the Fallout Shelter"

(episode 1.9). In this episode the team, confined to the Jeffersonian under quarantine on Christmas Eve due to the possible ingestion of spores, make the best of a bad situation by figuring out a way to celebrate Christmas while solving a 50-year-old murder. Brennan is puzzled by their efforts to celebrate Christmas, assuming that her Jeffersonian colleagues either are atheists like herself or, at the very least, informed intellectuals who understand the constructed nature of Christmas as a holiday.

**Brennan:** Indications are that Christ, if he existed, was born in late spring and the celebration of his birth was shifted to coincide with the pagan rite

of the winter solstice so the early Christians weren't persecuted.

**Booth:** Who are you, like the Christmas killer?

**Brennan:** It's the truth.

**Booth:** No, it sounds like the truth 'cos it's so rational, but the true truth is that you hate Christmas and you just spout all these facts and you just spoil it for everyone else.

They continue the conversation later on in the episode:

**Brennan:** How would you like me to spend Christmas?

**Booth:** Christmas is the perfect time to re-examine your standing with (he points up), you know?

**Brennan:** A helicopter pilot?

**Booth:** Oh right, right, you can't measure the man upstairs in your beaker so he can't possibly exist.

**Brennan:** The man upstairs?

**Booth:** You don't know if you're sick but you're more than willing to take drugs, just in case. Seems to me that you could give the man upstairs the same benefit of the doubt that you give a fungus.

Later, as the team gathers together to eat dinner, they discuss the murder they are trying to solve. Based on the evidence found with the body, they speculate that the murder victim "got a woman in trouble" in the '50s and possibly came to D.C. to procure an abortion for her.

**Angela:** This isn't a very Christmas Eve type story.

**Brennan:** Of course it is. The whole Christ myth is built on the travails of an unwed mother.

**Booth:** Ok can we just stop bringing up the whole Christ myth thing? Some people believe it's more than just a myth.

**Brennan:** Who besides you?

**Dr. Goodman:** That would be me, Doctor Brennan. I'm a deacon at my church.

**Angela:** I do, Christmas and Easter anyway.

**Hodgins:** Though I believe that organized religion is just another political movement designed to control the masses doesn't mean God doesn't love me.

**Zach:** I'm an empirical rationalist all the way unless you talk to my mother. Then I'm Lutheran.

In another episode, "Aliens in a Spaceship" (episode 2.9), Brennan and Hodgins are kidnapped by a serial killer/kidnapper known as the Gravedigger whose *modus operandi* is to kidnap children, bury them alive in a container with limited air, then demand a ransom. If the ransom is paid on time, instructions are given as to where to find the children. If it's not, the children are left to suffocate in an undisclosed location. The episode opens with a shot showing Brennan waking up, and after struggling to get out of the car, she discovers that the car is buried. She turns around to see Hodgins lying, injured in her back seat. From there we have a flashback to a crime scene where two bodies are found. They turn out to be young brothers whom the Gravedigger had taken several years before the discovery. The episode continues as a flashback, showing the team working to solve the murder, until it reaches the point when the Gravedigger kidnaps Brennan and Hodgins. At this point, it shifts to the present in which the team works frantically to discover where Brennan and Hodgins might be buried while the two use their scientific knowledge to survive and send a signal to their colleagues at the Jeffersonian.

Early in the episode, before Brennan is kidnapped, she and Booth have the following conversation:

**Brennan:** Has it ever occurred to you that God is a lot like the Gravedigger?

**Booth:** What?

**Brennan:** He lays down the rules. No way to question him or negotiate. Then it's almost as if he doesn't care how it works out. Either you do as he

says, make some sacrifices, and you're delivered, or you don't and you end up in hell.

**Booth:** I'd really appreciate it if you wouldn't say things like that because I really don't want to get struck by lightning.

**Brennan:** Do you go to church every Sunday?

**Booth:** Yes, I do.

**Brennan:** Can I come with you?

**Booth:** No, you can't.

**Brennan:** Why? It might help me to understand.

**Booth:** I'm not going to help you disrespect God in his own house. If you want to do some anthropological study, turn on a religious channel.

Later, as they are buried alive in the car, Brennan and Hodgins have the following conversation:

**Brennan:** Booth will find us.

**Hodgins:** You have a lot of faith in Booth.

**Brennan:** No, faith is the irrational belief in something that is logically impossible. Over time I've seen what Booth can do. It's not faith.

**Hodgins:** No offense, we're out of air. We don't know if our message got out, much less if anyone understood it and we're buried under ground. What you have is faith, baby.

Of course, Brennan's faith in Booth is rewarded. Even though the Gravedigger remains at large, Brennan and Hodgins are rescued just in time. The epilogue finds Booth and Brennan in church. She watches him as he finishes his prayer, crosses himself and then settles back into the pew:

**Brennan:** What'd you ask for?

**Booth:** That's between a certain saint and me. I did ask for a little help finding the Gravedigger.

**Brennan:** Good move. What's that smell?

**Booth:** The candles. And I said "thanks." You should try it some time.

**Brennan:** If I were going to pray, I would've done it just before we set off the explosion.

**Booth:** And you didn't?

**Brennan:** No, see, if there was a God, which there isn't...

**Booth:** Shhh, do you see where we are?

**Brennan:** And if I were someone who believed he had a plan...

**Booth:** Which I do...

**Brennan:** Then I'd be tempted to think he wanted me to go through something like I went through because it might make me more open to the whole concept.

**Booth:** It obviously hasn't.

**Brennan:** I'm ok with you thanking God for saving Hodgins and me.

**Booth:** That's not what I thanked him for. I thanked him for saving all of us. It was all of us; every single one. You take one of us away and you and Hodgins are in that hole together. And I'm thankful for that.

For Booth, and for the show as a whole, it is community and the relationships between people that inform religious experience and faith.

The dialogue between faith and reason takes on an additional aspect when Arastoo Vaziri, a new intern of Iranian descent who is a devout Muslim, joins the team. When he joins the team in season 4, he speaks with a thick accent and a bumbling bundle of colloquialisms that give the impression that he is a naive, backwards kid who is "fresh off the boat" from Iran. By the next season, he is caught out when he lets his accent slip, revealing that he speaks English fluently, like the educated person he is. Cam asks Sweets, the FBI psychologist, to talk to him:

**Sweets:** This place, the Jeffersonian, they see things in very black and white kind of terms.

**Arastoo:** It comes with the gig. We're scientists.

**Sweets:** Yeah, but unlike any of them, you're religious.

**Arastoo:** Muslim.

**Sweets:** This man I see in front of me, rational, pragmatic, highly intelligent; that man might have to explain his religion to people like that every single day whereas...

**Arastoo:** ... a kid from the sticks of Iran, newly arrived in the West, it's no wonder he clings to his cultural superstitions.

**Sweets:** There you go. Frustrating enough to drive a guy to fake an accent, which in my professional opinion is not crazy.

**Arastoo:** You're a pretty smart guy.

**Sweets:** But I don't need a scientist to tell me who I am. Neither should you.

Later in the same episode, Arastoo, arriving from prayers, speaks in his true, unaccented English to Cam, Hodgins and Angela. He tries to avoid the subject but Hodgins and Angela will not let him off the hook so easily. When Cam suggests that it is easier if he would just explain, he states that "I don't have an accent but I am devout and I do pray five times a day. When I speak as if I just got off the boat, people accept my religious convictions. Plus fewer terrorist jokes." Angela and Hodgins let the topic go for the moment in order to focus on their investigation of the crime at hand but, once the case is solved, they bring up the issue again:

**Angela:** Ok, let's have it.

**Arastoo:** Have what?

**Hodgins:** How do you balance an archaic religious belief with a life devoted to science?

**Arastoo:** This discussion is exactly what I'd hoped to avoid.

**Cam:** It's not our fault you let the accent slip.

**Arastoo:** There's no conflict between Allah and science. Allah created the mystery of the world, and science struggles, and mostly fails, to explain

it. But the search for truth is honorable and I honor Allah through the search for truth.

In their acceptance of Booth's Catholicism, Dr. Goodman's Protestant faith, Arastoo's Islamic practice, Angela's new age spirituality, and their encounters with a variety of faiths, the Jeffersonian team provides an illustration of a spiritually healthy university. In other words, the fictional Jeffersonian offers us a way to imagine what Roche observes as a "desire for new perspectives through reason, and, quite simply, the evaluation of the value of all persons" as fundamental to leading "a Catholic University to welcome persons of diverse faith."<sup>4</sup> He continues to state that such "a University gladly embraces those who, with intelligence and respect, can challenge and complement the Catholic character of the institution" and observes that "the Catholic University must seek to cultivate the inspiring model of those medieval thinkers from the three great Monotheistic religions who so elevated reason that they sought out competing traditions in order to see what was of value in them and to ask how these might relate to their own."<sup>5</sup>

The fact that the Jeffersonian team deals in murder on a daily basis provides a way in which the show can investigate the ways that faith and reason encounter, and respond to, the deepest aspects of human experience. In the face of grief and loss, reason meets its limits, leaving faith to carry the burden of offering comfort and solace. For the believer, loss, like evil and suffering, can test faith, raising the question "how can a good and loving God do this, or allow this to happen?" For others, including the empirical rationalists, death and suffering can be the conduit through which an inquisitive and open mind can explore other possibilities.

Not content to leave death to touch only the victims, suspects, and survivors, the series has confronted the Jeffersonian team with its own losses. In "The Hole in the Heart" (episode 6.22), a sniper turned vigilante murderer shoots Vincent Nigel Murray, one of Brennan's favorite interns, straight through



the heart. As he lies bleeding out with Brennan and Booth working desperately to staunch the wound, he says between each agonized breath, "Please don't make me leave. I love being here. Please, just don't make me leave. Please, just don't make me go. I don't want to go. It's been lovely." Brennan, distraught, keeps assuring him that they don't want him to leave, that they want him there, that he's loved and is, in fact, her favorite. Later, a grief-stricken Brennan and Booth have the following exchange:

**Brennan:** He kept saying "don't make me go."

**Booth:** What?

**Brennan:** Vincent. He was looking at me and saying, "don't make me leave." He said that he loved being there. Why would he think that I'm the one making him leave? What kind of person am I?

**Booth:** You've got that all wrong.

**Brennan:** No, I heard him. You did too. "Don't make me leave." That's what he said.

**Booth:** He wasn't talking to you.

**Brennan:** I was the only one there..and you. He wasn't talking to you.

**Booth:** He was talking to God. He didn't want to die.

**Brennan:** No, Vincent was like me, Booth. He was an atheist.

**Booth:** Ok, then he was talking to the universe then. He didn't want to go. He wasn't ready, Bones. He wanted to stay.

**Brennan:** If there was a God, he would have let Vincent stay here with us.

**Booth:** It's not how it works.

As the series unfolds, Brennan begins to trust Booth and, as she does, she begins to open up to the possibility of faith; if not in God, then in something that gives meaning to life and, perhaps more important, allows her to accept, through experience, the fact that some things can't be explained by rational argument or empirical proof. Booth learns from Brennan how to critically examine his faith and beliefs.

In addition, the two are often put in situations where Booth, feeling helpless or lost, must allow Brennan to use what she has learned from him to help him find his way out of doubt and back towards faith and his commitment to compassion, understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Together they experience what Pope John Paul II describes in *Fides et Ratio*, when he points out that:

the truths sought in this interpersonal relationship are not primarily empirical or philosophical. Rather, what is sought is the truth of the person—what the person is and what the person reveals from deep within. Human perfection, then, consists not simply in acquiring an abstract knowledge of the truth, but in a dynamic relationship of faithful self-giving with others... knowledge through belief, grounded as it is on trust between persons, is lived in truth: in the act of believing men and women entrust themselves to the truth which the other declares to them.<sup>6</sup>

Season 9 most powerfully exemplifies these words. At this point in the series, Brennan has, through her relationship with Booth and other members of the team, begun to let go of her imperviousness, becoming more vulnerable and therefore more open to others. She has entered a romantic relationship with Booth, they have had a daughter and Brennan has asked Booth to marry him. At the moment of their most intense happiness, Polante, a crazed serial killer obsessed with Brennan, forces Booth to break off the engagement and threatens to kill several innocent people if Booth tells Brennan the reason why. The desolation they are experiencing is destroying both Brennan and Booth, and putting a strain on the entire Jeffersonian team, who care deeply about both of them. Brennan discovers that Booth has been going to a bar so she goes there, hoping to find some answers.

**Aldo:** You're Booth's girl?  
Temperance Brennan?

**Brennan:** I wouldn't use the term  
"girl."

**Aldo:** I'm Aldo Clemens. I used to be  
Booth's confessor when he was a  
ranger. Me and him are having a hard  
time breaking the habit even though  
Booth's the reason I quit being a  
priest and decided God was my worst  
enemy.

**Brennan:** God is a myth.

**Aldo:** Oh, I don't think so. I think  
he's a bastard.

**Brennan:** Booth was a sniper. He  
asked for forgiveness from you every  
time he killed somebody?

**Aldo:** Through me, technically. You  
can imagine why I might get soul-  
sick, providing absolution.

**Brennan:** I don't believe in souls  
either.

**Aldo:** Booth loves you.

**Brennan:** Booth told you that?

**Aldo:** He confessed it to me. Not  
being married is a sin to him. I'm not  
sure an unbeliever can understand  
that kind of sacrifice.

**Brennan:** I wanted to marry him.

**Aldo:** Not as much as he wants to  
marry you.

**Brennan:** You want me to have faith  
in him?

**Aldo:** I've seen Booth do so very  
terrible and difficult things, but only  
if he was compelled by a very good  
reason.

When she returns home, Brennan tells Booth,  
"I'm not leaving you. I have absolute faith in  
you. I trust you. I know you love me. I'm  
sorry I lost sight of that temporarily. You're a  
good man. You have your reasons and when  
you can, you'll share those with me."

Brennan's path illustrates Pope John Paul II's  
words in *Fides et Ratio*:

With the light of reason human  
beings can know which path to take.  
But they can follow the path to its  
end, quickly and unhindered, only if

with a rightly tuned spirit they search  
for it within the horizon of faith.

Therefore, reason and faith cannot be  
separated without diminishing the  
capacity of men and women to know  
themselves, the world and God in an  
appropriate way.<sup>7</sup>

Her faith in Booth's faith helps her find a way  
to tune her spirit in such a way that she begins  
to allow faith to expand her limits, accepting  
that, in the words of *Fides et Ratio*, "there is no  
reason for competition of any kind between  
reason and faith: each contains the other, and  
each has its own scope for action."<sup>8</sup> In this  
way, she exemplifies the Pope's comments in  
*Fides et Ratio*, "The desire for knowledge is so  
great and it works in such a way that the  
human heart, despite its experience of  
insurmountable limitation, yearns for the  
infinite riches which lie beyond knowing that  
there is to be found the satisfying answer to  
every question as yet unanswered."<sup>9</sup>

Her yearning for the riches that lie beyond  
knowing becomes clearer to her in "The Shot  
in the Dark" (episode 8.15). Brennan is shot  
while working in the lab late at night. Booth,  
on an impulse, comes to find her. As she is  
being rushed to the operating room, she loses  
consciousness, floats into a white space, then  
finds herself in a space that looks like her  
childhood home, complete with her dead  
mother, Christine.

**Christine:** Hello Tempe.

**Brennan:** Mom. Ok, I understand  
what's happening. I'm hallucinating.

**Christine:** Most people get shot and  
appear in another reality, they ask  
themselves maybe they're in heaven?

**Brennan:** I don't believe in heaven.

**Christine:** Yet, here you are, having a  
conversation with your dead mother.

**Brennan:** You aren't actually here,  
mom. I lost consciousness while my  
adrenal system was working overtime.  
My brain is struggling to make sense  
of what's happened.

Always the observant scientist, Brennan looks  
around the room and comments on how

faithful it is to her childhood home. At her mother's urging, she tells her about her life, then says "I have to get back to them." Her mother tells her it is not her decision. When Brennan asks whose decision, her mom tells her she will not like it, to which Brennan replies, "I do not believe in God. I have to get back" and, after wrestling with the door, manages to wrench it open, to dissolve into pure white, and the scene returns to the operating room where the medical team is desperately trying to save her life.

Her heart stops and, once again, she finds herself in the other place where her mom says, "I hate to tell you I told you so, but it's not your decision." To which Brennan repeats, "I have to go back. I have a daughter." As they talk, her mother tells her that "your one, small problem is that you think you understand things that are simply not understandable. They throw you for a loop," at which point Brennan returns to the land of the living. Cam informs Booth that Brennan has survived the surgery and tells him how lucky they were that he got it in his head to visit her in the lab late at night, which allowed him to find her on time. Booth replies, "It's a miracle. Brennan, she doesn't believe in God but that's the only explanation, right?"

In the course of the episode, Brennan has two more close calls, and each time she ends up in the other place, talking to her mother. She tells Booth:

**Brennan:** For some reason, I think it's you who keeps calling me back.

**Booth:** Calling you back from where?

**Brennan:** I went to another place. My mother is there. Obviously I'm hallucinating, so...

**Booth:** Or she's helping you. You came back, that's the main thing.

**Brennan:** You honestly believe I could be seeing my mother?

**Booth:** Yes, I do.

In her last visit to the other place, she tells her mother that they will never see each other again and her mother reassures her that they

will. She tells Brennan that the advice she gave her when Brennan was young "to use your head, be rational, don't let your heart lead you but use your brain." This allowed her to survive and held true, but now she has another piece of advice: "it's time for you to find some of that little girl you locked away so deep inside yourself because it's not about surviving anymore—it's about flourishing. It's about living a full life." To which Brennan responds, "if this were real, I'd tell you I love you, that I miss you."

The episode ends visually with a high angle, "God's eye-view shot," looking down on Booth and Brennan. Whether Brennan believes it or not, the visual design implies that someone is looking down.

### ***Cura Personalis* and an Ethos of Hospitality**

The commitment the members of the Jeffersonian team show one another is essential in helping them stay centered and balanced in the face of the suffering and evil with which they are confronted every day. There are times when the pressures of the job become too much and while they may not use these words, they are at times overwhelmed with the challenge of finding God in all things. Yet they know that the only way they can maintain their balance and humanity is to keep looking for the good and to keep fighting for justice.

They succeed to the extent that they maintain their community as *men and women for others*, reminding each other that good does exist, and offering each other opportunities to reclaim the sense of wonder that informs their humanity, exemplifying what Pope John Paul II observed in *Fides et Ratio*:

Human beings seek to acquire those universal elements of knowledge which enable them to understand themselves better and to advance their own self-realization. These fundamental elements of knowledge spring from the wonder awakening in them by the contemplation of

creation: human beings are astonished to discover themselves as part of the world, in a relationship with others like them, all sharing a common destiny. Without wonder, men and women would lapse into deadening routine and little by little would become incapable of a life which is genuinely personal.<sup>10</sup>

For example, in “A Boy in a Bush” (episode 1.5), Angela reaches a point where, overwhelmed by death, destruction and human depravity, she feels that she has lost something vital to who she is as a creative, artistic person. Dr. Goodman, who was in season 1 their boss (he was replaced by Cam in season 2), helps her find another perspective on her contributions to their efforts:

**Angela:** Zach’s work consists in removing flesh from human corpses. Hodgins dissects bugs that have been eating people’s eyeballs.

**Dr. Goodman:** And how do you see your job?

**Angela:** I draw death masks.

**Dr. Goodman:** Is that really how you see it?

**Angela:** Don’t you?

**Dr. Goodman:** You are the best of us, Miss Montenegro. You discern humanity in the wreck of a human body. You give victims back their faces, their identities. You remind us all of why we’re here in the first place; because we treasure human life.

The series is unique in that, while it relies on a cast of regular recurring characters, as do other television series, it invests each of its characters with dignity and respect. Its characters do not just exist to propel the narrative forward or to provide a foil for the leads. They are not there to add atmosphere, diversity, or texture. All of its characters are allowed to make mistakes, fall in love, fall out of love, deal with trauma, learn and grow from trauma, and contribute to the growth and development of one another. They are fully embraced members of the team, included

in the family, as they are often reminded in word and deed by the main characters. Because the show follows an “intern-a-week” structure, the team and the viewers get to know, respect, and care about each one individually.

As scientists who use and expand their scientific knowledge to solve murders, they exemplify the ideal of the life-long learner, in love with the life of the mind. In this way, the Jeffersonian and its inhabitants exemplify what Mark Roche has identified as:

The Catholic tradition, inspired by the concept of the unity of knowledge, seeks...to cultivate meaningful and integrative thought across disciplines and argues that morality is not one sphere separate from the others but that it infuses all spheres...that] the diverse spheres of inquiry should be studied to illuminate one another...and that] the diverse branches of human knowledge can be integrated and synthesized, and that a greater harmony exists among the spheres of knowledge or about the greatness and limits of her own disciplinary contributions.<sup>11</sup>

They are also deeply moral, compassionate and empathetic individuals, drawing on their own experiences, including race and ethnicity (Clark and Cam are African-American, Angela is half Chinese, Rudolfo is Latino and Arastoo is Persian), gender, class (Wendell, Booth and Finn represent the working class) as well as regional, national, and religious identities. They grapple with their histories, use them to gather and exchange wisdom and seek counsel and comfort from one another. For example, her parents and brother abandoned Brennan when she was fifteen, leaving her in the care of the foster system. As the series unfolds, she discovers that her parents were bank robbers and abandoned her and her brother Russ to save them from very dangerous people. She also learns that her mother was murdered by one of these dangerous men. Her father re-enters her life and, with Booth’s help, she

learns to forgive, accept, and invite him back into her life. Her experience of spending so many years not knowing what happened to her parents motivates Brennan to work so hard to identify bodies and to give their families answers.

Booth's father was a raging alcoholic who beat Booth, his mother, and brother. His mother abandoned the family when Booth was very young and his grandfather raised the two boys. Later in the series, Booth finds that he cannot forgive his father or his mother and, in a reversal of positions, Brennan confronts Booth with the fact that he is acting contrary to his own belief system, which opens the space for Booth to forgive and accept. His experiences have shaped him into the kind of man who runs into the burning building to save others.

Sweets's father was also abusive, resulting in Sweets having been removed from the home and placed in foster care when he was very young. An elderly couple who died not long before Sweets joined the team eventually adopted him. It was his encounter with a loving family who created a safe space in which he could heal and flourish that led him into psychology and the desire to help others find a way to accept and then transform their suffering into something good.

For them, morality is not a sphere separate from others but infuses every aspect of their lives. Time after time they give evidence through their actions and speech that they see themselves acting in solidarity with others to make the world a more just, fair and safe place. In episode after episode, different characters are given the opportunity to stand with others. For example, both Brennan and Sweets use their experiences with the foster system to connect with young suspects and/or victims. In several episodes, the team shows up at the cemetery to show solidarity with the family whose loved ones have been murdered. Brennan and Hodgins use their wealth (Brennan's from her other life as a best-selling novelist and Hodgins from a family inheritance) to help those in need, providing scholarships, paying for funerals in

the cases where survivors can't afford them, and, in one case, investing in a community devastated by the economic downturn.

## Conclusion

From the beginning, the series sets up the Jeffersonian as a place in which the characters will not just solve murders but will also, in their friendship and companionship, accompany one another on a journey towards growth and development as men and women in solidarity with others. This includes the victims whose stories they try to tell, the families who seek answers, and even the perpetrators who, no matter how terrible the crime, are still humans, deserving understanding and compassion. In their encounters with one another, the team reminds us that, as Pope John Paul II wrote in his encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio*, "reason too needs to be sustained in all its searching by trusting dialogue and sincere friendship. A climate of suspicion and distrust, which can beset speculative research, ignores the teaching of the ancient philosophers who proposed friendship as one of the most appropriate contexts for sound philosophical inquiry."<sup>12</sup>

"The Lance to the Heart" (10.2) shows this most profoundly. The team has lost Sweets who has been killed in the line of duty. At the end of the episode, they gather in Sweets's favorite spot to say good-bye:

**Daisy:** He would have been so happy to know that you were here.

**Booth:** He knows.

**Hodgins:** Yeah, I think we all feel that way.

**Brennan:** I don't.

**Booth:** Bones.

**Brennan:** I do believe Sweets is still with us. Not in a religious sense because the concept of God is merely a foolish attempt to explain the unexplainable.

**Booth:** Bones, I don't think this is the place.

**Daisy:** It's Ok

**Brennan:** But in a real sense, he's here. Sweets is a part of us. Our lives, who we all are at this moment have been shaped by our relationships with Sweets. Each of us is like a delicate equation and Sweets was the variable without whom we wouldn't be who we are. I might not have married Booth or had Christine. Daisy certainly wouldn't be carrying his child. We are all who we are because we knew Sweets. So I don't need a God to praise him or the universe he sprang from because I loved him. I used to explain love as the secretion of chemicals and hormones but I believe now, remembering Sweets, seeing what he left us, that love can't be explained by science or religion. It's beyond the mind, beyond reason. What I do know, loving Sweets, loving each other, that's what makes life worthwhile. Right now, I don't need to know more than that, which is extremely embarrassing coming from an extremely intelligent, fact-based person.

In the relationships that develop between the characters as well as the ways in which specific cases raise questions about faith and reason, the Jeffersonian exemplifies the spiritually healthy institution, defined by John B. Bennett and Elizabeth A. Dreyer as a place in which "faith and reason, knowledge and character...are not distinct and sufficient unto themselves. Each involves the other."<sup>13</sup> They observe that "oppositional contrasts between faith and reason in religiously sponsored universities are almost always unproductive and misleading. Instead, the more energetic the faith dimension, the better the university—understanding the energy of faith to point toward comprehensive understanding of the creation (both the natural world and human reason)" so that "both inquiry and faith intrinsically lead into and engage the other."<sup>14</sup>

While the Jeffersonian is not a religiously sponsored university, it is a place where inquiry and faith lead into and engage one

another on a regular basis within the context of a community of people committed to the highest principles of hospitality and care for one another as individuals shaped by their personal histories. HJE

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Bones*, created by Hart Hanson (Los Angeles: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Television, 2005-2017).

<sup>2</sup> Mark Roche, *The Intellectual Appeal of Catholicism and the Idea of a Catholic University* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2003), 30.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, *Encyclical Letter* (Vatican City, Italy: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), September 14, 1998, sec. 32, retrieved from [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091998\\_fides-et-ratio.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html)

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 16.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 17.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Roche, *The Intellectual Appeal of Catholicism*, 34-35.

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, sec. 33.

<sup>13</sup> John B. Bennett and Elizabeth Dreyer, "Spiritualities of—Not at—the University," in *A Jesuit Education Reader*, ed. George W Traub, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 128.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.